

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND SELECTBOARD
MEETING MINUTES
REMOTE VIA ZOOM, 1 AVENUE A, TURNERS FALLS, MA
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3, 2021

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Meeting was opened at 6:01 PM by remote participation via Zoom

- **Montague Finance Committee members:** Jen Audley, Fred Bowman, Greg Garrison, Chris Menegoni, Francia Wisnewski, Jennifer Waryas, and John Hanold
- **Montague Selectboard members:** Rich Kuklewicz, Michael Nelson, and Chris Boutwell
- **Gill Finance Committee members:** Tupper Brown, Sandy Brown, Peter Turban and Claire Chang
- **Gill Selectboard members:** John Ward, Greg Snedeker, and Randy Crochier
- **FCTS Administration:** Superintendent Richard Martin, Business Manager Russ Kaubris, and Treasurer Eileen Seymour
- **GMRSD Administration:** Superintendent Brian Beck and Director of Operations Joanne Blier
- **GMRSD School Committee Members:** Jane Oakes
- **FCTS School Committee members:** Bryan Camden at 6:45 (New Salem), Sandy Brown (Gill) and Rich Kuklewicz (Montague)
- **Others:** Montague Town Administrator Steve Ellis, Montague Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, and Gill Town Administrator Ray Purington

The Chair announced that the meeting is being streamed and recorded by the MCTV and asked if anyone else was recording the meeting. No one else was recording the meeting. Remote participation for both members and the public was provided by Zoom. The link to the recording is <https://vimeo.com/519733332>.

Meeting Introduction

Ms. Audley opened the meeting and introduced the Montague Committees and staff members. The Montague Selectboard and Gill Committees opened their meetings and identified themselves.

FY 2022 Budget Discussion

Franklin County Technical School Presentation

Messrs. Martin and Kaubris presented the highlights of FY21 achievements and FY22 goals and budget requests. (A final set of their slides will be circulated later in March, after school committee endorsement – figures below are drawn from a preliminary draft.) The school has operated on a hybrid model, in part by subdividing the Assembly Hall into four class areas and in part by reconfiguring the gymnasium and cafeteria for adequate physical distancing. Grants received during FY2021 have aided preparation for a new shop in Veterinary Services. Mr. Martin observed that the proportion of Tech School students utilizing Special Education services is now 32.5%, the highest in the county.

Total enrollment at the school rose to 532 in Fiscal Year 2021 from 485 in Fiscal Year 2020, and is expected to rise again to about 570 in Fiscal Year 2023 and beyond; addition of incoming

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students and deletion of graduates will result in approximately 95 from Montague (down from 107) and 17 from Gill (up from 15) for Fiscal Year 2023. Applications continue to be steady, and the school is not yet at capacity of 642. Mr. Martin calculates that addition of four students is necessary to support an added teacher.

The Operating budget is estimated to rise about 6.9%, though total assessments to member towns will rise only about 2.5% -- a strong increase in state aid and non-member tuition is responsible for the difference. Capital assessments are down about 2.6%, in the third year of a fifteen-year bonding. In response to a question from Ms. Chang, Mr. Martin said that the provision of \$300,000 in each of Fiscal Year 2021 and Fiscal Year 2022 is an early step toward funding future capital needs from savings rather than from fluctuating annual assessments.

The total assessments, including capital are:

Montague	\$1,223,242 down 1.8% from \$1,255,456
Gill	\$229,193 up 18% from \$193,583 (approx.)

The changes in total enrollment, each town's enrollment, and shifts in calculation of Chapter 70 state aid partially explain the year-to-year differences.

Gill-Montague School Presentation

Mr. Beck and Ms. Blier presented a slide-set distributed in advance of the meeting, and began with their focus on a District Improvement Plan. The District is operating largely remotely, and their emphasis has been on the emotional and social health of students and continuing progress toward equity and diversity goals. The availability of CARES and other COVID-related special funding have made possible improvements in the physical facilities, which enhance eventual return to in-class teaching.

A challenge has been coping with a reduction in enrollment from 1,074 to 970 and the resulting return to a "hold harmless" position in Chapter 70 state aid, in common with at least 21 other schools in the Pioneer Valley and all but 41 districts in the state. A doubling of home-schooled students from 35 – 40 to 80 is part of the reason. 7.5 staff positions were added, partly classroom aides and partly specialist positions, to address the changed educational environment. The total budget grew by 2.4% to \$24,123,185 while state aid rose 0.4%; as a result of changes in Chapter 70 calculations. Gill's assessment dropped 4.1% to \$1,724,635 and Montague's Affordable Assessment rose 2.0% to \$10,950,854. The District continues to utilize reserves – School Choice, Circuit Breaker, and Excess & Deficiency – to a limited degree to balance the budget.

Ms. Wisnewski left at 7:57 PM. Mr. Snedeker left before the meeting's conclusion.

Topics Not Anticipated within 48 Hours and Requests for Future Agendas

No late news was reported.

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Agendas for Future Meetings

March 10 – Board of Health, Airport, Town Meeting and Emergency Management Director

March 17 – Review DPW, Capital Improvements Committee Report

March 24 – Discussion of Reserves, Balancing the budget

Adjournment

Montague Finance Committee Moved: To adjourn at 8:05 PM.

Vote: Audley-Aye, Hanold-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Bowman-Aye, Menegoni-Aye,
Waryas-Aye

Montague Selectboard Moved: To adjourn 8:05 PM.

Vote: Kuklewicz-Aye, Nelson-Aye, Boutwell-Aye.

Gill Finance Committee Moved: To adjourn at 8:05 PM.

Vote: T Brown-Aye, S Brown-Aye, Turban-Aye, Chang-Aye

Gill Selectboard Moved: To adjourn at 8:05 PM

Vote: Crochier-Aye, Ward-Aye

Respectfully submitted by John Hanold

List of Documents and Exhibits:

- Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Review Package (Gill-Montague)